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# INTERIOR DECORATION AS A PROFESSION FOR WOMEN.

BY CANDACE WHEELER.

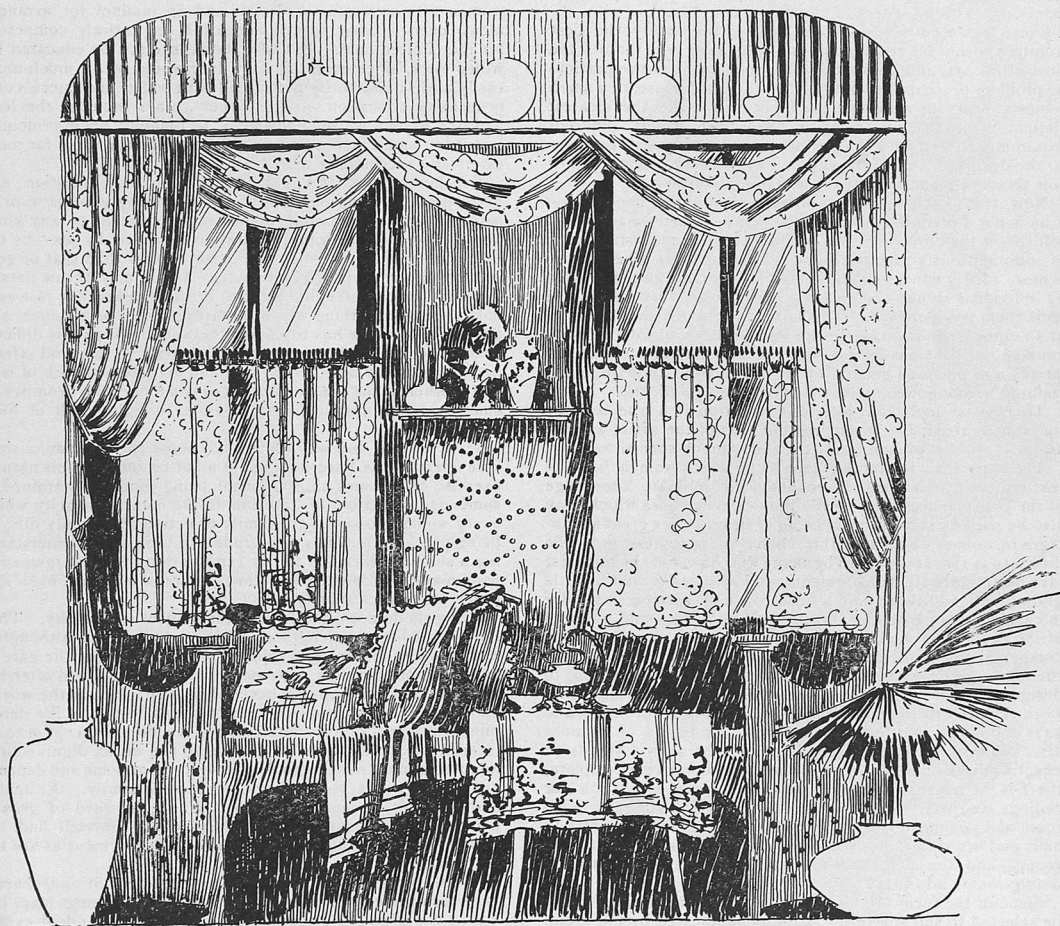


POSSIBLY there is no profession that, at first thought, seems so natural and appropriate a one for women as that of interior decoration; but perhaps the very appropriateness of it to a woman's usual capacity may be misleading and mischievous, since it is very likely to prevent the serious and comprehensive study without which no profession can be worthily followed or its practice genuinely respected.

Interior decoration, at its best, certainly demands very varied and exact knowledge. A man or woman may paint pic-

gaining entire approval from art lovers, even where the author of it has the gifts or genius of the artist without the wider education demanded by other professions. But the decorative artist must have the artistic gift or ability in all its phases; must understand form, and be able both to draw and model it; he must have what is called the *color sense* very highly developed, and, in addition to these gifts and their attendant knowledge, he must have an exhaustive familiarity with the literature of the art, and a knowledge of its practice extending back through all the varied styles of centuries and periods and generations.

I am often asked the question, "Is decoration a good field or profession for women?" and I can readily answer, "Certainly it is! if women will educate themselves for it." But what would you think of a painter who proposed to paint a picture without preliminary training, not only in drawing and perspective, but in methods and mediums? And yet he could do this far more easily, because his work is individual and independent, than the decorator can make a good interior with-



DESIGN NO. 3. SCHEME FOR DECORATING A BAY WINDOW.

tures or model statues which deal with the emotions of nature or the vicissitudes of life, and the work may be absolutely complete as a picture or statue, appealing to human feeling and

out wide knowledge of well-directed study. And this is because the work of the latter must supplement and follow, must in fact be a part of that of the educated architect.

It is necessary for the decorator to be cultivated in the same line with the architect to properly follow and combine the work, for where the two stand as widely apart as education and ignorance might place them, the work must necessarily be incongruous and unworthy.

Of course I am speaking now of real excellence, of decoration as an *art* and not as a pretty arrangement of curtains, carpets and furniture, which are more or less in harmony with each other in color, and more or less good in shape, design and manufacture; this sort of thing means *interior arrangement*, and not interior decoration, or decorative art.

Any ordinarily clever woman can arrange her own home in a way to "make the most of it"; she can bring pictures and books and personal and household belongings in an agreeable *ensemble*; and, if she is blest with what is popularly known as "an eye for color," she will be able to make a home interior enjoyable to her friends and good to live with. But that is quite another thing from an interior containing treasures of art in every line of human capacity, so disposed of as to make a perfect mosaic of excellence; or even from an interior in which there are a few such things, and which must be on a plane of superiority with a successful effort of the architect.

Every man who builds a house wishes to employ the best architect within his reach or means—the man who knows the most of his art, and knows how best to adapt it to the particular problem presented to him. If it is a grand house, or a small domestic nest, the cleverest architect will make the clearest distinction in his treatment of these two widely different requirements, and he will do it because he *is* the cleverest man. So the decorator, who follows him in his work, should know how to adapt his treatment to the same conditions.

Now, truth compels me to confess that the man decorator—if he is not a mere man of trade, as many of them, alas! are—will follow the purpose of the architect more understandingly or conscientiously than the woman. Perhaps this is because he is more widely educated, and is less interested in and impressed by individual things; he has less enthusiasm for objects, he feels them less strongly. This latter fact, which should result in an immense advantage to the woman, is an absolute disadvantage until she has learned to generalize and not to particularize; and practical generalization comes from knowledge and training—from power to subordinate things to effects.

There is no doubt that interior decoration is a true field for the woman artist, but it requires the gifts of the artist as well as those of the woman, and it requires much special *training*.

The apparently instinctive knowledge which women have of textiles, and which men have not; the intimate knowledge of the conveniences of domestic life—conveniences which may also be used as factors in a scheme of beauty—are great advantages to women who make this choice of a profession. The difficulty is that it is chosen by many who have not the remotest idea of its ultimate requirements, and who fancy that a little gilding here and there, and a little touch of harmonizing color in curtains and carpets, make up the whole duty and business of the decorator; when, in fact, the real decorator should be competent to compare and apply all the interior ornament of the house, to draw the detail of frieze or cornice or ceiling, to design chandeliers and fixtures, to select and direct the metal-work required for chimney-places, the hardware of locks and keys and doors, and the thousand and one details of a house after the work of the architect is completed and it stands in effect a finished building. And when these details are complete, there is the question of color and appropriate decoration for ceilings and walls—for treatment which will distinguish each room and commend it to its own proper use, giving dignity to halls and drawing-rooms, ease and cheerfulness to the family rooms, and the suggestiveness of their several uses to the dining-room and library.

Some of the furniture may have to be designed, and all must be selected to suit the styles or periods indicated by the architect in the fashion of the house as well as the pecuniary ideas of the house-owners.

It will be seen that here is a large demand for educated ability outside of the artistic feeling, which women are apt to consider the only necessary stock-in-trade necessary for the interior decorator. It is not to be wondered at that this idea that natural good taste is the only necessary equipment of the decorator obtains so largely, because it is only very recently that the thorough decorative artist has made his appearance.

Before that the paper-hanger and painter, the cabinet-maker, upholsterer, and the carpet salesman divided the honors between them, and made interiors not always or perhaps often to the satisfaction of the refined householder, but quite as good as could be expected without unity of purpose or guiding skill or knowledge.

Now, with the improved results of what are rightly called artistic manufactures, both in wall-papers and general house-furnishings, and with the general diffusion of art knowledge, and the instinctive color sense of Americans, many a house is made beautiful by the selection and choice of some one in the family who possesses in a high degree the feeling for harmony and subordination which makes the perfect home. This is what occurs in most homes of moderate cost where the family are characterized by general cultivation; but there are a large number of homes belonging to the "well-to-do" members of society who have none of this general cultivation, and are well aware of their own lack of it. They can appreciate what they see in other houses, but how the result is attained is and remains a profound mystery to them.

Here is the natural field of the woman decorator. The woman with cultivation and taste and an instinct for arrangement, even without special education, is entirely competent for this limited field. But why should she not be educated for wider work, since even this easy duty would be so much more easily and satisfactorily performed with wider and more comprehensive education? The larger always includes the less, and the woman whose knowledge is founded upon principles instead of small facts and experiments does her work far more safely and successfully.

But how to get this wider knowledge is the question; and here comes in a serious difficulty. There is a general want of serious preparation among women for professions of any kind, and this want of serious preparation is caused by sex—by the uncertainty of continuance in any work other than that of general manager of family interests. A girl may throw herself heartily into a profession for two or three years, but just as it is becoming something which requires energy, persistence, and determination, she has to choose between making this difficult road in life, over which she may finally walk in ease and safety, or taking advantage of the safe and accustomed path of wife and mother in the companionship of some one who promises to share with her, and, as far as possible, to lighten, all of life's difficulties.

It is natural and well for her to choose this companionship. The question, as I see it, is not at all of renouncing this natural exercise of woman's ability, but of being thoroughly trained in some one direction, in addition to the natural capacity which every woman possesses for family direction and family life; of being prepared for life's vicissitudes, of thoroughly understanding a subject which, in all its ramifications and enlargements, may make the woman ten times more of a woman even in a purely domestic capacity.

But girls do not often look at the subject in this way. They do not realize the length of life's road, and that, although it may seem to be entirely fulfilled when one enters the gate of marriage, one-third of a woman's life is usually lived after her children are grown up and have taken their place in the world, and that the education and use of the early part of life determine the aspect of this latter third, decide whether it is to be interesting and useful in its relation to the world, dignified and honorable in its relation to the family, or wearisome and dependent to one's self, to the world, and to the family. A capable and growing woman, one who has had the seed of growth planted in her youth by thoughtful education, will find the "latter days" as full of enthusiasm and enjoyment as are the early ones.

We all recognize the detriment to development and character which the expectation of a fortune is to a young man, but we do not always recognize the fact that the confident expectation of marriage operates in the same way upon the development of character in a young girl; it discourages her proper preparation for any other place in life. But since special education and earnest study cannot unfit her for marriage, it seems to me a great misfortune to have it act so universally as it certainly does against the painstaking acquirement of a profession. This whole subject of professional education among women needs to be much more carefully and thoughtfully considered both by parents and young women themselves, since at present

the attitude of the general mind toward it is one of uncertainty and doubt, and tends to make all professional study inoperative and incomplete.

But suppose this question is well settled in the mind of a girl, and she determines to adopt decoration as a profession and to prepare herself thoroughly for it, the next question is, How is she to acquire this thorough preparation? There is no course of decorative study in any of our colleges, as there is of architecture, and no school of art which carries this preparation further than the acquisition of different elements which must be afterward combined in a whole, and carried forward as a whole, if the student wishes to master the art in its entirety.

It is as if a boy who had chosen architecture as a profession could study only certain parts of his profession under competent teachers, could learn the different requirements of construction only by bits, and was obliged to bring them all together and calculate their effect upon each other by experi-

modeling with a fixed purpose, and from thence he is led up to more independent work, such as figures and groups.

Sculpture to be decorative need not, however, be wholly in the service of architecture. A figure can be of decidedly decorative intention without being in a frieze or pediment, or set over a window. Of all sculpture, a fountain seems to me



"SHOCKED" (HEAD OF MONK). DRAWN BY SOPHIE BERTHA STEEL FROM THE ORIGINAL BUST BY PAUL LACHENMEYER.

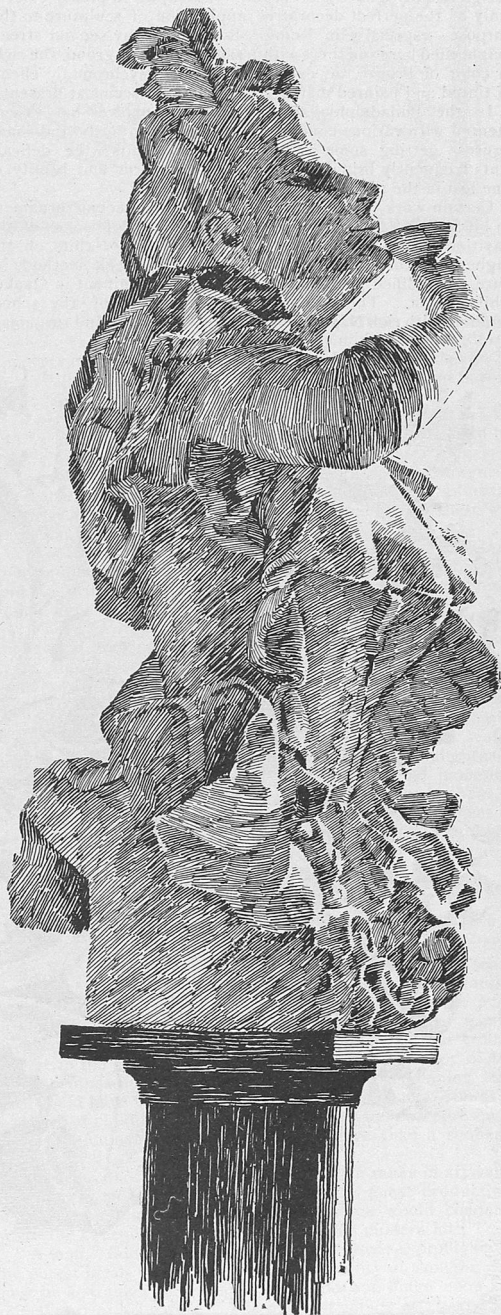
ments, each one of which might exhibit a new and undoubted flaw, for want of the master-teaching which is really so happily within his reach. And yet this is the way in which at the present time a woman must study decoration.—*The Outlook*.

#### THE INDUSTRIAL ART SCHOOL OF THE PENNSYLVANIA MUSEUM AT PHILADELPHIA.

BY HOWARD FREMONT STRATTON, DIRECTOR OF THE ART DEPARTMENT.



FROM before the time of Phidias down to the present era sculpture has been chiefly allied with architecture, its most important development taking the form of applied decoration. As plastic decoration rises into still greater relief on the chiseled wall it becomes evident that there is but a step between the very highest form of mural relief and the detached statue. This is the historical method of the growth of sculpture, first appearing simply as a decoration and afterward as a free and independent art. It is this consideration which dominates the method of education taught in the Philadelphia Art School, the student being first taught a definite application of



"A VOTRE SAUTÉ." DRAWN BY SOPHIE BERTHA STEEL FROM THE ORIGINAL BUST BY PAUL LACHENMEYER.